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PRIORITY

CONFIDENTIAL RELEASED IN PART

INCOMING

ACTION

DEPARTMENT OF STATE 1.4(D)
ARA/NEA REARCS

RG 2318

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ACTION: VE (02)

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INFO: DAND (02) RJ (01) MM (01) JPL (01) JRH (01) ARA (01) PPC (01)
OAS (01) PPA (01) EPSC (04) DEPC (01) LNE (01) CO (02)
EC (01) PE (01) BL (01) DCAR (01) DEP (01) TDG (01) BR (02)
----- 26/1123Z A1 RD (TOTAL COPIES: 028)

ACTION ARA-00

INFO LCG-00 ACDA-00 ACDE-00 AID-00 ACO-01 CEA-01 CTME-00
DODE-00 DOCE-00 SRPP-00 BS-00 EB-00 EXIN-01 E-00
FRB-00 K-01 TEDE-00 INR-00 ITC-01 L-00 ADS-00
NSAE-00 NSCE-00 OMB-01 OPIC-01 PA-00 PM-00 PRS-00
P-00 SP-00 SSO-00 STR-00 TRSE-00 T-00 FMP-00
PMB-00 DSCC-00 DRL-04 G-00 FDIC-01 NFAT-00 SAS-00
/022W

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P 252055Z SEP 98
FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1818
INFO AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
AMEMBASSY QUITO
AMEMBASSY LIMA
AMEMBASSY LA PAZ
CIA WASHDC
DIA WASHDC
USIA WASHDC 1799
USCINCSO MIAMI FL
AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN
AMEMBASSY BRASILIA
USDOC WASHDC 3089

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE

CLASSIFIED BY DEPT. OF STATE, M. GRAFELD, DAS, A/GIS, ACTING

REVIEW AUTHORITY: ADOLPH H EISNER

CLASSIFICATION: CONFIDENTIAL REASON 1.5(D)

DECLASSIFY AFTER: 24 SEP 2023

DATE/CASE ID: 14 JUN 2010 200503654

CONFIDENTIAL CARACAS 002911

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/25/08
TAGS: PGOV, PREL, ECON, EFIN, VE

SUBJECT: HENRIQUE SALAS ROMER: THE CONFIDENT PRESIDENTIAL
CANDIDATE

CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR JOHN F. MAISTO. REASON 1.5 (B).

SUMMARY

PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE HENRIQUE SALAS ROMER TOLD AMBASSADOR.
DURING A SEPTEMBER 22 BREAKFAST MEETING, SALAS, CURRENTLY NUMBER
TWO IN THE POLLS (TRAILING CHAVEZ BY 10 TO 15 POINTS), TOLD
AMBASSADOR THAT HIS CAMPAIGN IS "ON TRACK" AND THAT HE WILL CATCH
CHAVEZ BY LATE OCTOBER. SALAS SAID THE MEDIA AND HIS POLITICAL
ENEMIES "HAVE ALWAYS UNDERESTIMATED ME," AND DECLARED THAT HE HAD
SET UP A VERY EFFECTIVE NATIONWIDE ORGANIZATION WITH REGIONAL
COMMANDS AND AN ACTIVE PRESENCE AT PRECINCT LEVEL. SALAS SAID HE
WOULD

PRESENT A COMPREHENSIVE PROGRAM
TO ADDRESS THE REAL PROBLEMS CONFRONTED BY VENEZUELANA TODAY:
JOBS, SALARIES, INFLATION, PERSONAL SECURITY, HEALTH CARE, AND
EDUCATION. AMBASSADOR TOLD SALAS THAT WE WERE COMMITTED TO THE
ELECTORAL PROCESS AND WOULD RECOGNIZE AND WORK WITH WHOMEVER THE
VENEZUELAN VOTERS CHOOSE TO BE THEIR PRESIDENT. HOWEVER,
AMBASSADOR SAID THE USG WOULD BE FORTHRIGHT IN ITS SUPPORT FOR
DEMOCRATIC, CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT AND THE DEEPENING OF ECONOMIC
REFORM. END SUMMARY.

USG TO SUPPORT THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS

2. (C) AMBASSADOR MET SEPTEMBER 22 WITH PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE
HENRIQUE SALAS ROMER. THIS MEETING IS THE FIRST IN A SERIES OF
MEETINGS WITH PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES FOLLOWING THE AMBASSADOR'S
RETURN FROM CONSULTATIONS IN WASHINGTON.

3. (C) AMBASSADOR TOLD SALAS:

-- WE ARE COMMITTED TO FREE AND FAIR ELECTIONS IN VENEZUELA.

-- WE WILL RECOGNIZE AND WORK WITH WHOMEVER THE VENEZUELAN PEOPLE
CHOOSE TO BE THEIR PRESIDENT.

-- WE WILL MEET WITH ALL MAJOR CANDIDATES, INCLUDING FORMER
GOV. AND CURRENT FRONT RUNNER HUGO CHAVEZ. OUR DECISION
REGARDING CHAVEZ'S INELIGIBILITY FOR A VISA, HOWEVER, HAS NOT
CHANGED.

-- OUR NEUTRALITY IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS DOES NOT IMPLY
NEUTRALITY REGARDING OUR FUNDAMENTAL INTERESTS IN VENEZUELA AND THE
REGION. WE WILL FORTHRIGHTLY SUPPORT DEMOCRATIC AND CONSTITUTIONAL
GOVERNMENT, THE DEEPENING OF ECONOMIC REFORMS, AND COOPERATIVE
COUNTERNARCOTICS, AMONG OTHER THINGS.

-- CURRENT UNCERTAINTY REGARDING THE OUTCOME OF THE PRESIDENTIAL
ELECTIONS HAS FANNED CONCERNS IN THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY ABOUT
THE STABILITY AND WELL-BEING OF THE VENEZUELAN ECONOMY, AND THAT
ALL PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES NEED TO CHOOSE THEIR WORDS VERY

CAREFULLY TO AVOID AGGRAVATING AN ALREADY BAD SITUATION.

SALAS: MEDIA NOT COVERING ME ENOUGH

4. (C) SALAS SAID IT WOULD BE "NATURAL" FOR THE AMBASSADOR TO MEET
PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES, ALTHOUGH HE NOTED, "REALLY, THE U.S.
AMBASSADOR SHOULD MEET WITH ONLY THE FIVE LEADING CANDIDATES" --
SALAS, SAEZ, ALFARO, FERMIN, AND, OF COURSE, CHAVEZ.

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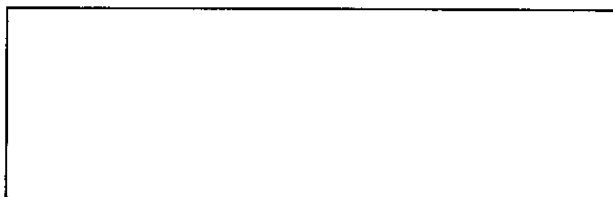
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7. (C) SALAS REFERRED TO A POLL BY MERCOANALYSIS, TO BE PUBLISHED THIS WEEKEND, INDICATING THAT HE HAD CLOSED TO WITHIN TEN POINTS OF CHAVEZ. THE POLL, BASED ON INFORMATION GATHERED IN AUGUST, SHOWED CHAVEZ WITH 39 PERCENT SUPPORT AND SALAS WITH 29 PERCENT SUPPORT. A JULY POLL DONE BY THE SAME COMPANY SHOWED CHAVEZ WITH 35 PERCENT SUPPORT AND SALAS WITH 22 PERCENT SUPPORT. SALAS EXPECTS THE SEPTEMBER POLL TO NARROW THE GAP EVEN MORE, AND POSITION SALAS FOR HIS GOAL OF CATCHING CHAVEZ IN OCTOBER. (SALAS MADE A POINT OF TELLING THE AMBASSADOR THAT HE DID NOT COMMISSION THE MERCOANALYSIS POLL, BUT INSTEAD SUBSCRIBES TO THE POLLING SERVICE FOR A NOMINAL FEE.)

SALAS THE ORGANIZATION MAN



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SALAS SAID THAT HE PLACED A TREMENDOUS EMPHASIS ON ORGANIZATION, SOMETHING THAT PAID OFF IN HIS HOME STATE OF CARABOBO WHERE HE WAS TWICE ELECTED GOVERNOR AND ROUNDLY DEFEATED CANDIDATES OF BOTH MAJOR PARTIES. TODAY, SALAS' SON HENRIQUE SALAS FEO WAS POLLING IN THE HIGH 60S FOR RE-ELECTION AS GOVERNOR, AND THE AD/COPEI GUBERNATORIAL CANDIDATE WAS POLLING BETWEEN 10 AND 20 PERCENT, STATED SALAS.

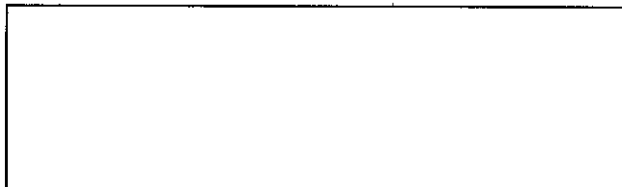
SUBSTANCE VERSUS PROCESS



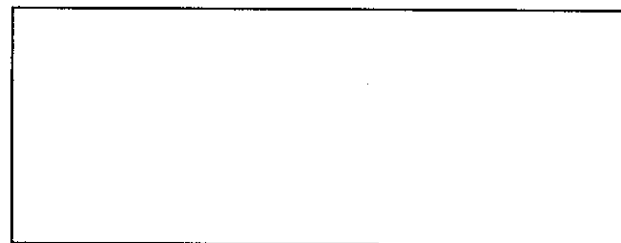
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ACCORDING TO POLLING DATA, WHEN PEOPLE WERE ASKED IF THEY PREFERRED A NEW CONSTITUTIONAL ASSEMBLY OR CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE EXISTING CONSTITUTION, THE PUBLIC OVERWHELMINGLY

PREFERRED OPTED FOR THE CONSTITUTIONAL ASSEMBLY. HOWEVER, WHEN ASKED IF THEY PREFERRED A CONSTITUTIONAL ASSEMBLY OR REALISTIC POLICIES TO DEAL WITH JOBS, SALARIES, INFLATION, THE COST OF LIVING, PERSONAL SECURITY (I.E. MORE AND BETTER POLICE), HEALTH CARE, AND EDUCATION, THEY OVERWHELMINGLY PREFERRED SOLUTIONS TO THESE ISSUES.



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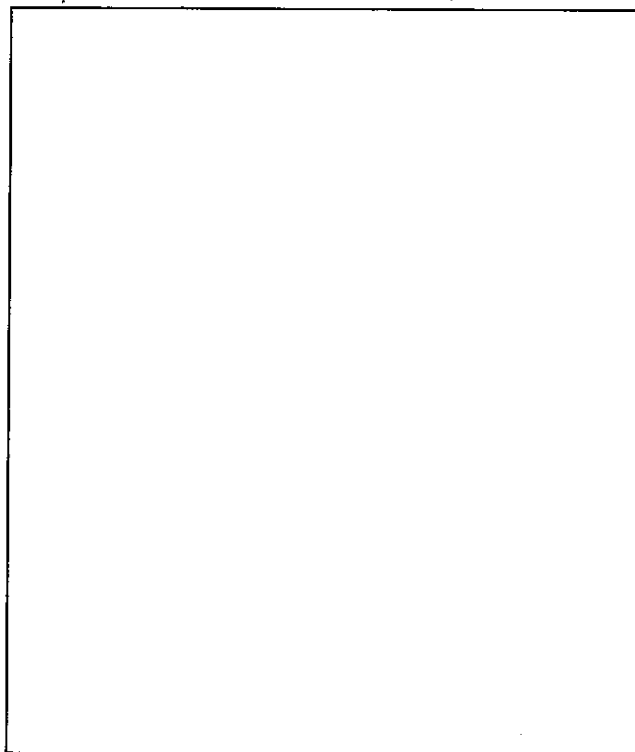
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NATIONAL ELECTORAL COUNCIL DOING A GOOD JOB; OBSERVERS NEEDED

12. (C) DISCUSSING THE NATIONAL ELECTORAL COUNCIL (CNE), SALAS

SAID THAT THE POLITICAL PARTIES HAD BEEN TRYING TO CONTROL THE COUNCIL, BUT WOULD NOT BE SUCCESSFUL. SALAS MET WITH THE CNE, AND WAS SATISFIED THAT THEY WERE DEDICATED TO DOING A GOOD JOB. FURTHERMORE, SALAS STATED HE BELIEVED THE AUTOMATION OF THE ELECTIONS WOULD WORK. SALAS DID OPINE THAT SOME MONEY MIGHT BE BEING MADE, OR HAD BEEN MADE, ON THE SIDE ON CONTRACTS RELATED TO THE ELECTIONS, BUT THAT THIS WOULD NOT AFFECT HOW THE CNE DID THEIR WORK. FINALLY, SALAS ADDED THAT HE WANTED INTERNATIONAL ELECTION OBSERVERS, AND ASSUMED THAT THE USG WOULD PARTICIPATE IN AN OBSERVATION EFFORT.

COMMENT



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